

THE AMERICAN COMMUNISTS TODAY

Parting of the Ways?

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FOR the first time since its "Bolshevization" over three decades ago, the Communist party of the United States is facing a convention, to be held this month, which will actually decide party policy and not merely approve a decision laid down in advance. Today, the party leadership is in no position to present the convention with the traditional *fait accompli*; the leaders themselves are sharply divided, and the convention must choose among them. Still less can Moscow issue directives, as in the past, and have them automatically obeyed; one of the key issues before the convention is precisely that of the relation between American Communists and Moscow.

Of course, the monolithic exterior of the party has always concealed real internal fissures. Some of these related to questions of doctrine and tactics. More were in essence merely struggles for power; in these, ideas were weapons—and nothing more. Often enough the rival groups fought first, and only subsequently decided what they had been fighting about. In the 20's, the fights still sometimes came to the floor at conventions; factional alignments in the American party reflected those in Moscow until Stalin succeeded in consolidating his personal dictatorship. But this did not mean that the convention actually decided between the contending factions. That decision came from

THIS month the American Communist party holds its first national convention in six years, amid internal dissension such as it has not known since the 1920's. The symptomatic importance of the event and its circumstances are here given their full due by MAURICE J. GOLDBLOOM, a frequent contributor to these pages. Mr. Goldbloom's last previous article in this magazine was "New Moderation in Security," in November 1956. His "Stalin Builds a Trojan Horse Against America," in November 1952, can now be seen, in retrospect, to have accurately predicted the course of Communist policy over the intervening years.

Moscow, and the convention majority simply registered it.

Sometimes the minority was still permitted to preserve a degree of independent existence—on condition that, under the regime of "democratic centralism," it accepted the official line without question. As long as his position was not completely secure in Russia and the Comintern, Stalin wanted to have an alternative ready to hand in case the group to which he had given the leadership proved undependable in the factional struggle. He even made such use of people already expelled. Until after the Great Purge of the 30's, many leading posts in the Soviet regime were still held by former oppositionists who had accepted defeat. Stalin could keep informal channels open through them to their former factional allies in other countries. Thus the Lovestoneites in America had been allied to the "right opposition" in Russia; years after their expulsion, the former right oppositionist Henry Yagoda was still head of the GPU. The Lovestoneites defended the first Moscow Trial. (Even much later, the expelled Earl Browder was held like a Damoclean sword over the heads of his successors for over a year, as American agent for Soviet books!)

The history of the Lovestone faction clearly illustrates the nature of "internal party democracy" in the pre-1929 period. In 1923 this group (at that time headed by Charles E. Ruthenberg, who died in 1927) lost out to another, headed by William Z. Foster and James P. Cannon. In 1925, however, the Comintern intervened in favor of the Lovestone-Ruthenberg group, which forthwith became the majority. In 1928 the Lovestone leadership took advantage of the crushing of the Trotsky-Zinoviev opposition in Russia to consolidate its own position. Cannon and various of his followers were expelled as Trotskyites in October 1928, and his allies William Z. Foster and Alexander Bittelman only saved themselves from a like

fate by deserting Cannon and bringing charges against him before Lovestone could attack them. When the next Communist party convention met in March 1929, Lovestone was in complete control; Foster had only his own vote, while five delegates supported another opposition group led by the relatively unknown Earl Russell Browder. But meanwhile Stalin was turning his attention from the Trotskyites to the right opposition. Lovestone was summoned to Moscow and ordered to surrender his leadership, agree to a condemnation of his faction, and accept the official party line. But he left Moscow on June 11, 1929, without the Comintern's permission, after sending word to his lieutenants to put into effect previously prepared plans for resistance and seizure of the party's properties and institutions. What happened next is perhaps best described by Robert Minor, a Lovestone associate who double-crossed him. Minor reported to the Comintern: "I am proud to say, and it is one of the very few things of which I still may boast, that within twenty-four hours we turned a majority of 85 per cent for Lovestone into a majority of 85 per cent against Lovestone." As for the party membership, it accepted the Comintern's deposition of Lovestone just as docilely as it had accepted the Comintern's imposition of the Ruthenberg-Lovestone leadership in 1925.

THE fact that changes of leadership in the American Communist movement have generally been associated with changes of line has sometimes led casual observers to the conclusion that the splits, expulsions, and factional struggles have been based on genuine divisions of principle. They seldom have. Thus the one major doctrinal deviation of Lovestone at the time of his fall in June 1929—his belief that the United States would prove an exception to the world economic crisis predicted by the Comintern—ceased to be an issue a few months later. The issue of dual unionism, later a bone of contention between the Lovestoneites and the Communist party, was a post-expulsion development. Some of the principal Communist dual unions had been set up while Lovestone was still the party leader, and Lovestoneites held positions of leadership in dual unions for years after their expulsion from the CP. On the other hand, William Z.

Foster, who carried out the full-fledged dual union line after 1929, was a veteran advocate of "boring from within."

Again, Earl Browder found it no more difficult to compare Roosevelt to Hitler in 1933 and 1940 than he did to apotheosize him in 1936 and 1944. It seems at least conceivable that he would have been willing to shift once again if Moscow had given him the chance instead of hitting him over the head when he wasn't looking. (Browder's fall was precipitated in 1945 by an article published in France by Jacques Duclos. News of this first reached the United States via the *New York Times*, several days before the American Communists were officially informed of it—it was neither the first nor the last time that Moscow allowed its American disciples to learn of a change of line from the capitalist enemy.)

Until this year any leader of the American Communist party was simply an instrument of the Kremlin; factional struggles were competitions for the role of chosen instrument. The line of the American party was determined by the requirements of Soviet domestic and foreign policy, with little relation to objective conditions in the United States. Party leaders were chosen in the same way. The Kremlin could, and sometimes did, shift both line and leader at the same time. But it could also change either without the other, and did so when that suited its purposes of the moment. Hence, while it may sometimes be convenient to refer to the "Lovestone" line or the "Browder" line of the American Communist party, this is merely a form of shorthand; the proper expression would be "the Stalin line in the United States in the *n*th year of the proconsulship of A."

The enthusiasm with which a line was applied, and the details of its application, could, however, never be fully determined in Moscow. A local leader could therefore leave his imprint on the line, although he could not fundamentally change it. Stalin certainly decided that the American Communists should support Roosevelt, "national unity," and the no-strike pledge during the war. Their enthusiasm for Smith Act prosecutions of Trotskyites and pro-Nazi crackpots reflected the international Communist line. But there was a specifically American touch when Browder, told by a reporter for

the newspaper *PM* that he sounded like the National Association of Manufacturers, replied: "That's fine. I'm awfully glad to hear that. I'm not sorry when you say that leading members of the NAM talk like me. My report to the plenum was distributed to every delegate at the economic conference of the NAM, and I am told most of them read it through. I am very happy when I get news like that."

There was perhaps one real exception to the above-mentioned rule: no matter how conciliatory the party line of the moment might be, William Z. Foster always remained at heart an unreconstructed left-winger. Hence Moscow never really trusted him and gave him the party leadership only when it had no choice. To many of the party members, and perhaps to himself as well, he symbolized "the Revolution." Like it, he could be laid on the shelf when expedient, but he could never be altogether dispensed with. Because of what Foster stood for, and also because he was the one person of genuine stature ever to play a leading role in the American Communist movement, he was able to stand alone against Lovestone in the Communist party's 1929 convention and against Browder in its 1944 National Committee.

In a sense, the core of the party has always leaned to the left. (This was shown in the avalanche of letters from the rank and file denouncing the "Browder line" which poured down on the *Daily Worker* during the discussion period that followed the publication of the Duclos article.) The reason for this is simple. When the party swung to the right, members who had been recruited on the basis of a "revolutionary" program could usually rationalize the line as a tactical concealment of the party's true aims. This rationalization was certainly not without its core of truth—though the party's truest aim was always not the revolution, but the aggrandizement of the Soviet leadership. But when the party adopted a leftist line, there was no way in which those other members who really believed in the right-wing line could persuade themselves that revolution was merely a camouflage for reform. They could believe, or they could get out. Hence the apparent paradox that while left-wing lines and leaders tended to be considerably more popular in the party than

right-wing ones, they were also apt to bring sharp drops in party membership. It should be noted, however, that few of those who bade the party farewell when it shifted to the left ever formed right-wing Communist groups afterwards; Lovestone was the exception, and he took few rank-and-file members with him. (When Benjamin Gitlow broke with the Lovestone group, I asked one of its leaders for the reason. He replied: "Gitlow is essentially a mass leader, and we have no masses to lead.") Most of those who quit the party after the various left turns simply ceased to be Communists.

Nor all who had joined the party on the basis of its right-wing appeals in the Popular Front period of the 30's and the war period later dropped out, however. A few were gradually metamorphosed into full-fledged party stalwarts ready to accept the discipline of any line and die if need be for the "Workers' Fatherland." Others were trapped. Some had integrated their lives so thoroughly with the Communist movement that to break meant to disrupt their social and in some cases their economic lives. For others, something more sinister was involved. For it was precisely during the Popular Front and war periods that the Communist penetration into government, both for the purpose of influencing the formulation and execution of policy and for the conduct of espionage, reached its height. It is doubtful whether the first stages of this infiltration were actually planned by the party. In 1933 the expansion of government into new fields of activity began to open up wide employment opportunities for college graduates. In the depression years, large numbers of these had been unable to find jobs, and a good many had turned to Communism. Now they, as well as their non-Communist fellows, flocked to the Washington fleshpots. When they rose to positions where they could hire others, or simply when they heard of openings, they brought in their comrades; the party served as an employment agency. (This was also a means of recruiting new members in a period of mass unemployment.) Soon this informal migration to Washington drew the attention of certain party leaders and of the Soviet intelligence agencies to the possibilities of systematic infiltration.

Infiltration was also greatly facilitated by the adoption of the Popular Front line, which made Communists both harder to detect and more acceptable to many non-Communists. Some of the things that happened then have become public through the testimony of Whittaker Chambers, Elizabeth Bentley, and others. Much can still only be guessed at. But one thing is clear. A person who had once handed over a secret United States document to a Soviet agent, even if he had done so only out of the purest "anti-fascist" motives, was thenceforth bound to the Communist movement by ties much stronger than those of doctrine.

WHEN Khrushchev's secret speech exposing Stalin's crimes burst on it, the American Communist party had been reduced to a hard core of convinced revolutionaries, devout adherents of the Soviet Union, and individuals so seriously compromised or so deeply involved in a personal sense that withdrawal from the party was possible for them only at a very high price. Very few had been recruited in recent years. A "left" line normally attracts few members in a period of prosperity, and events since 1945 had hardly made the party's ties with the Soviet Union a political asset. Many, including a high proportion of the leaders, dated back to the party's earliest days. Most of the others had joined during the depression and held on to the "locomotive of history" while it dashed through the Popular Front, the Hitler-Stalin Pact, the no-strike pledge, and "de-Browderization." (The few party members under forty were in large part hereditary Communists, the children of older party members.) Many of them had possessed power of one sort or another—in government, in the labor movement, in the cultural world—and had abused it in the interests of the party and of the Soviet Union. Many had made substantial sacrifices for the Communist movement. A rather high proportion were "professional revolutionaries"—people who had served as party functionaries and been directed from one job to another in accordance with the party's needs of the moment.

The members whom the Communist party recruited during the Popular Front and war periods came, in varying proportions, from all sections of American society

and their motivations were many. But those who formed the bulk of the party membership before 1934 and remain its backbone today fall into two main groups. The largest, numerically, is and has always been predominantly located in the East and is of recent European origin. This group always included a high percentage of professional and middle-class people. But in the early period of the party's history, manual workers probably predominated among them. Today such manual workers are very much in the minority. To a considerable extent, this is the result of the success of non-Communist trade unionism; thus many outstanding figures in the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union today were Communists in the 20's and 30's, and their shift from Communism to anti-Communism mirrors a similar development among rank-and-file garment workers. Although Communists secured positions of influence in many sections of the trade union movement during the great organizing wave of the 30's, their strength was concentrated in the newer unions, where they profited by their ability to supply organizers to a labor movement that was desperately short of trained personnel. In most cases, the workers in the newly organized industries were native in background and orientation; at the same time, the Communists were steadily losing ground in their one-time strongholds among workers of European origin. (By 1939 the fur workers were the only remaining Communist beachhead in the needle trades.)

Moreover, the number of Communist workers of foreign background was reduced not only by defections from Communism, but by defections from the working class. Frequently this occupational shift was associated with an increased facility in English. A good many of those who thus changed their class status did not, however, change their politics; it may even be that because of a sense of guilt about rising from their class rather than with it, they were more reluctant to break with Communism than were the comrades whom they left behind in the factories. But their ties with the party were now more than ever ideological rather than economic, and related more closely to developments in Europe than in America. Communism for them meant the Soviet Union; they saw American events in terms

of their effect on Russia just as much as any Russian did. The situation was similar in regard to the hereditary Communists, who joined the party because their parents had brought them up that way. To a large extent, these alumni of the Young Pioneers, the Young Communist League, the American Student Union, and other Communist or Communist-infiltrated youth groups entered the professions and the civil service; they also furnished the party with many of its younger functionaries.

THE new members recruited in the 30's—both during the early depression and during the later Popular Front period—were also predominantly drawn from the middle and professional classes. There was an economic factor in the party's attraction for them; in some ways they were harder hit by the depression than were the manual workers. The white-collar and professional workers' unions formed at this period were to a considerable extent an outgrowth of organizations formed among members of these economic groups on relief or employed by the WPA. Particularly in the Northeast—which was where their strength centered—most of these unions were not only under Communist leadership, but, in contrast to the situation in most Communist-led unions of manual workers, a high proportion of their members were consciously and overtly fellow-travelers at least. The party also recruited these non-proletarian elements on the basis of their admiration for Soviet planning and Soviet anti-Nazism.

For the first time, Communist fronts developed into at least the beginnings of mass organizations. Among the most influential were the American Friends of the Soviet Union, the American League against War and Fascism (later the American League for Peace and Democracy), and the North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy. Many members of these fronts, especially of the last-named, were neither Communists nor in any real sense fellow-travelers. This was, indeed, a measure of the Communist success; while maintaining control of the organizations, they drew to them a broad stratum of non-Communists who thus became unwitting instruments of the party, were subjected to a constant barrage of its propaganda, and served as a re-

cruiting ground for new members. All these organizations were overwhelmingly middle class in composition; their greatest strength lay in the Northeast and in California.

To an even greater extent, the same thing was true of the Communist-controlled fraternal insurance society, the International Workers Order. This organization was an important source of financial support to the party, as well as a means of mobilizing those on its periphery and binding them to itself by a variety of social and economic activities. The "workers" in this organization's title were notably absent from its membership; where the other three groups appealed mainly to assimilated but still Europe-oriented white-collar workers and intellectuals, the IWO had its roots among small businessmen still not quite at home with the English language. The mass following of all these organizations was ephemeral; except for the IWO, whose members were tied to it by their financial stake in its insurance features, they were practically wiped out by the Hitler-Stalin pact. Their successors in the period after Hitler's invasion of Russia addressed similar appeals to the same groups with results which, while substantial, never equaled those attained in the 30's. But those whom the party did succeed in recruiting through such organizations added to its middle-class component.

THE second major group in the American Communist movement has always been much smaller, but has had an importance in party activity and an influence in party councils disproportionate to its numbers. It has been stronger in the West than in the East, and has derived more from the long tradition of native radicalism than from the Bolshevik revolution. This group originally consisted mainly of workers of native and North European stock. Later it drew to some extent on non-European minority groups. Manual workers are relatively more important among the members of this second group than among Communists of East European background. A good many of the older ones went through the Industrial Workers of the World at one time or another; some had held fairly important posts in American Federation of Labor unions. William Z. Foster himself had been entrusted by the AFL with the leadership of

the packing-house organizing campaign of 1917 and the great steel strike of 1919. Clarence Hathaway had been a district secretary of the Machinists Union and a vice-president of the Minnesota State Federation of Labor. In the organizing drives of the 30's, the Communists attained a considerable degree of influence in some fields in which the IWW had once been active, and where many workers were veterans of its struggles. Among these were the Woodworkers, the National Maritime Union, the West Coast longshoremen led by Harry Bridges, and the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers. On the whole, members of this group were Communists because of their resentment against the existing order in the United States. They were for Soviet Russia because they expected Russia and the Comintern to help bring about an American revolution; the question of what was happening in the Soviet Union was of relatively little importance to them. Their concern with the United States repeatedly brought them into conflict with their European-oriented comrades in the American Communist movement. They did not feel at home in the Communist movement during its first years, when the dominant foreign-language federations insisted that the party operate "underground" in Russian style. The American radical tradition had always emphasized outspoken rebellion, not conspiratorial secrecy. But if they did not share the "infantile leftism" of the party's underground period, most of them were likewise unhappy during the periods when Soviet interests imposed a right-wing line. Cannon became a Trotskyite. Foster furnished a "left" opposition both under Lovestone and during the war period, when Browder was uniting with the NAM in defense of the Soviet Union and free enterprise. After more than a quarter of a century in the party, William F. Dunne was expelled as a "left deviationist" at about the same time that Browder departed to the right. (Those expelled with Dunne included a number of key Communists in the National Maritime Union. It was their support that made it possible for Joe Curran finally to break with the Communists and smash their power in the NMU. Later Curran turned on his allies in that struggle and destroyed them too—with the aid of still other ex-Communists!)

The members of this group were loath to sacrifice the revolution in America in order to "defend the Soviet Union"; that ran counter to the Soviet Union's meaning for them. The considerations motivating their opposition to ultra-right lines were basically akin to those which from time to time led trade-union Communists to break with the party because its political demands conflicted with the interests of their unions. Indeed, many Communists of this type were alternately or even simultaneously troubled by the party's political and trade union lines for what might superficially appear to be opposite reasons. But just as a right-wing political line may seem to involve the sacrifice of the revolution, so an adventurist—as well as a "class-collaborationist"—line may threaten the functioning of a trade union.

ON THE whole, the situation from the fall of Browder in 1945 to the Khrushchev speech in 1956 was one in which there were few ideological strains between the American-oriented and European-oriented groups in the American Communist party. (Personal friction arising from differences in background, and even prejudice, probably continued under the surface if not on it. In an earlier time, after the expulsion of the Lovestoneites, the *Daily Worker* had referred to them as the "Lovestone-Gitlow-Wolfe-Hester Street crowd.") Tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union called for a leftist line. American capitalism was the international enemy of those American Communists who thought first of Russia, and the domestic enemy of those whose main interest was in working for the revolution at home.

True, the party's membership and influence were declining; almost all except the hard core of veterans had deserted it. Prosperity made it relatively easy for unions and employers to arrive at mutually profitable agreements, and relaxed the class struggle. Prosperity, together with progress in the fields of social legislation and civil rights, increased the sense of identification with the United States of even the most underprivileged. This and the growing antagonism between Russia and the United States tended to isolate the Kremlin's American allies. Very few Americans were anxious to be "liberated" by the Soviet Union.

At the same time, both the government and the labor movement brought the Communists under very heavy fire. The government adopted loyalty and security procedures, prosecuted Communists under the Smith Act, tried to denaturalize and deport them, and harassed them in countless ways. Communist-controlled unions were expelled from the CIO. Other unions systematically raided their membership. The once-powerful United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers Union was reduced to a shadow of its former self. The Communist caucuses which had almost seized other major unions melted away. The Communist-controlled unions of white-collar workers and other centers of Communist influence in the Eastern labor movement practically disappeared, except for a few that found shelter under Jim Hoffa's wing in the Teamsters.

But all this left the Communist influence in the West Coast longshoremen's union and the Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers almost unshaken. Particularly to the Western metal miners, the near-outlawry into which the Communists were thrust must have seemed like a point in their favor. For government attacks on their unions were nothing new. Many of them had personal and all of them "cultural" memories of the persecution which the IWW had sustained at the hands of lawless police, trigger-happy company guards, and sadistic mobs; these memories were kept fresh by occasional similar incidents in some areas. Newspaper disapproval of their union leadership could hardly be expected to affect workers who had always seen their leaders and themselves slandered by the same newspapers. Nor could they be expected to heed the disapproval of a society from which they had always been to a considerable extent cast out. In the Southwest, too, many of the metal miners were of Mexican descent and found in their union a refuge from discrimination. (This factor also helped to sustain the loyalty of many Negro longshoremen to Harry Bridges, and some Puerto Rican and Negro machinists in the New York area to the United Electrical Workers.) What happened in Butte or Bisbee—or even what had happened in those places a generation earlier—was more important to them than anything in far-off Russia.

Though the international Communist

movement switched from an ultra-left course to a new popular front in the last two years of Stalin's life, this had relatively little effect in the United States. The enemy against whom the Communists were seeking allies through their new popular front was the United States; they directed their appeals to the bourgeoisie elsewhere—but against that of the United States. Hence in this country the new line meant only that they sought—with little success—to secure the broadest possible support for their opposition to American foreign policy, and were willing to call a truce in minor feuds to achieve that end. Nor did the first changes in Russia and in the satellites under Stalin's successors, and the rapprochement with Tito, affect the American Communist party very much. For one section of its membership, all this was Soviet policy, and therefore right; Stalin had made abrupt changes of line, and people who had swallowed the Hitler-Stalin pact could scarcely be expected to gag at eating crow prepared by the Yugoslav chefs. For the other major group in the American Communist movement, the changes in Soviet policy were remote matters and therefore irrelevant.

BUT the Khrushchev speech, and the other revelations and events which preceded, accompanied, and followed it, disrupted this internal harmony. The two main groups in the party reacted in quite different ways. For the American-oriented revolutionists, Stalin's sins were more or less irrelevant; he had been the enemy of their enemies, and that was what counted most. If his successors wished to denounce him, that remained their own affair—as long as they continued to fight against American capitalism (though perhaps it was a bit of a pity that they had to provide ammunition for the capitalist press). Nor were Communists of this type unduly disturbed by revelations of Soviet anti-Semitism; philo-Semitism had never been a strong passion with them.

But the larger part of the membership and even leadership of the American Communist party entered upon a crisis which was as much spiritual as political, and had no precedent in the entire history of Communism. The defamation of Trotsky and the Old Bolsheviks had proceeded gradually over a period of years. Even so, their

transformation from revolutionary heroes into factional opponents, then into defeated oppositionists, then into conspiratorial rebels, and finally into Gestapo agents, was too much for some party members and followers to swallow—yet just because each step paved the way for the next, more had accepted than balked. Even the Hitler-Stalin pact, which shook the faith of some of the hardiest Communists for a few weeks, was quickly rationalized as a necessary measure to prevent the West from “unleashing” Hitler against the Soviet Union. Stalin’s infallibility and the sanctity of the Soviet Union remained inviolate; faith triumphed and was even reinforced in the hearts of those who stayed. They had defended the Moscow Trials; and after the war they found it no problem at all to justify the extermination of “counter-revolutionaries” and “Zionist agents of Tito and the FBI” in Eastern Europe. Charges of Soviet anti-Semitism they rejected as slanders against the country that had saved the world from Hitler. The break with Tito meant that he was deserting the camp of progress for that of reaction; the Kremlin’s reconciliation with him and its confession of error merely showed once more the superlative generosity of the Soviet leaders and their readiness to expose their rare mistakes to pitiless self-criticism.

Now, however, the late “Father of the Peoples” was revealed on the highest authority of the Soviet Union *itself* to have been a Moloch. The wreckers, saboteurs, Nazi agents, and assorted dregs of humanity who had been slaughtered en masse in the Soviet Union and its satellites over the past twenty years turned out to have been selfless patriots devoted to the cause of Communism even in their dying breaths, from whom confessions had been wrung by inhuman tortures. The military genius who had conquered the Nazis single-handed was revealed as a coward and incompetent who had almost lost the war by his blunders and his loss of nerve. And worst of all—for those Communists whose faith in the Soviet Union was to so large an extent based on its supposed elimination of Russia’s traditional anti-Semitism—was the confirmation of the charges of anti-Semitism leveled against the Soviet Union by anti-Communists as not only true, but far short of the reality.

The men on whom this blow fell had, by and large, sacrificed a great deal for the party and the Soviet Union. Many of them had gone to prison; more had lost jobs or suffered other economic penalties. Now they were told that they had been sacrificing themselves in the interests of a murderous, half-demented tyrant, and that the truths they had been proclaiming were lies. Some of them had doubted, but had suppressed their doubts because belief was their life. Now there was no escape. At first they sought one desperately. They begged the Soviet leaders for some explanation of how one man could pervert and turn the entire system from good toward evil, and whether there must not have been fatal defects in the entire structure to make this possible. They wanted to know how Stalin’s colleagues, who had become his successors and now his judges, could escape a large share of the responsibility for the crimes in which they had been his accomplices. They worried about the possibility that such abuses could be—perhaps were even already being—repeated. They were not unmindful of the fact that the charges and the procedures in the cases of Beria and his former adherents closely followed the pattern of the cases Khrushchev had denounced as frame-ups. They had, indeed, begun to ask some of these questions even before Khrushchev’s speech, on the basis of Mikoyan’s public attack on Stalin at the 20th Party Congress in February 1956.

Similar questions were being asked in other Communist parties (in Italy, for instance, by Palmiro Togliatti), but in most cases with far less emotional urgency. Communists in other countries might raise these questions because they were implicit in the situation, but they seldom had the same need for adequate answers. And no adequate answers came, because there could be none. Continued references to “the cult of personality” were singularly unsatisfying.

The editors of the *Daily Worker* (and apparently a majority of the American party’s National Committee) decided that the American Communists could not themselves escape a share of the blame for Stalin’s sins; this was a position non-Communists had arrived at a good many years earlier. On June 10, 1956, the *Daily Worker’s* foreign editor, Joseph Clark, wrote: “The blind and un-

critical attitude of the *Daily Worker* during the past years to the Soviet Union only did grave damage to our goal of promoting a socialist movement in this country." The *Daily Worker* announced that in future it would not repeat its error in this respect. Articles appeared that would previously have been inconceivable in a Communist publication. The editors even went so far as to indicate that they doubted the fairness of the trial of the former Azerbaijan Communist leader, Bagirov, executed as an accomplice of Beria. The *Daily Worker* even raised questions about Soviet foreign policy, criticizing the Russians along with the West for not having insisted that Egypt permit Israeli ships to pass through the Suez Canal.

At the same time, editors and ordinary party members were using the columns of the paper to subject the party's theory and tactics over the previous decade to sharp criticism. The party's isolation and the sharp fall in its membership were attributed to its left sectarianism and overestimation of the threat of world war and American fascism. There were many condemnations of bureaucracy and of the absence of internal party democracy. The period before Browder's expulsion had been characterized by similar "self-criticism." The difference was that this time the criticism did not reflect any directive from Moscow, it was largely criticism of Moscow. And there were many differing opinions expressed. Indeed, the New York State organization of the party even went so far, in August 1956, as to overrule the violent objections of William Z. Foster and permit the publication in the party's discussion bulletin of a long defense of Browder. Some Communists also raised the question of dissolving the party and setting up a political or even a purely educational association in its place, or of trying to merge it into a larger grouping of "left-wing forces" in the United States.

But the Soviet Union, Stalin, and post-Browder Communist policy in the United States were not without their defenders. William Z. Foster was chief among these; no one was more closely identified with the postwar Communist turn to the left than he. The national committee tried to bridge the two opposing positions with formulas both ambiguous and ambivalent. Thus on June 25, 1956, it declared: "We cannot ac-

cept an analysis of such profound mistakes which attributes them solely to the capricious aberrations of a single individual, no matter how much arbitrary power he was wrongly permitted to usurp. It is just as wrong to ascribe all the mistakes and violations of socialist principle to a single individual as it was to ascribe to him all the achievements and grandeur of socialist progress in the USSR." This could be interpreted as a defense of Stalin—or as a criticism of the Soviet dictatorship.

After the Russians had attacked their Communist critics abroad, in a reply specifically aimed at Togliatti, the National Committee of the American party adopted another statement on July 19 and made it public on July 26. This praised the Russian resolution as a "valuable and important contribution to analyzing the origins, effects, and lessons of the mistakes made by the CPSU under Stalin's leadership," and "a convincing answer to the big business enemies of socialism who claim that the gross mistakes made under Stalin's leadership are inherent in socialism." But it added that "certain aspects of past violations of socialist principle," including "the question of bureaucratic distortions in a socialist society, as well as the happenings in the sphere of Jewish cultural organizations and their leadership," needed further study. And it reiterated that "friendly criticism" was the "right and duty" of all Communist parties.

A FURTHER stage in the development of the National Committee's position was marked by its adoption on September 13 of a draft resolution for submission to the party convention scheduled to open on February 11. This resolution was accepted only with reservations by Foster and Benjamin J. Davis; later Foster changed his vote to an outright negative. The National Committee criticized the party for having adopted a sectarian approach, and attributed that approach to unsound political and economic analyses which resulted in an overestimation of the dangers of war and fascism. Specific criticism was directed against a trade union policy that antagonized "progressive" unionists, the proliferation of Communist fronts with no mass basis in fields where effective non-Communist organizations existed, the formation of the Progressive party despite

the absence of trade union support, and "the introduction of a system of leadership which . . . tended to accept a status of illegality and abandoned many possibilities for the public functioning of the party."

Were such criticisms just the normal accompaniment of a change of line? Possibly they were, as could also have been the declaration that "Bureaucratic concepts of party organization, systems of leadership, and relations between the party and the masses . . . hindered the early and timely correction of these errors. Wrong concepts of leadership discouraged full and free participation of the membership in the discussion of policy and tactics." But the following pronouncement was unprecedented: "Our party has also suffered from an oversimplified approach to and an uncritical acceptance of many views and ideas of Marxists and Marxist parties in other countries. . . . *The party must distinguish better between the additions to Marxist theory made by Lenin which are valid for all countries and those specific aspects of Lenin's writing which reflect exclusively certain unique features of the Russian revolution or of Soviet Society. Likewise, the Communist Party will have to be bolder in re-examining certain Marxist-Leninist theories which, while valid in a past period, may have become outdated and rendered obsolete by new historical developments*" (italics mine). When did the American Communist party, or any Communist party, ever issue a statement like that before? One might almost suspect that, by his close association with Stalin in their joint tomb, Lenin had come to share his successor's guilt; no wonder Bill Foster voted no!

The draft resolution went on to give some examples of the doctrines to be scrapped, saying: "For example, we as well as other Marxist parties have already discarded as obsolete Lenin's thesis that war is inevitable under imperialism. We have long since discarded as incorrect Stalin's thesis about the alleged law of inevitable violent proletarian revolution. Likewise, we are making important modifications in the theory of the state, as evidenced in our advocacy of the peaceful, constitutional path to socialism." If one could take these statements at face value, there would be very little left of Communism. But Communists have many times in the past made statements repudiating vio-

lent revolution, dictatorship, and the doctrine of the inevitability of war—though they have not hitherto described such repudiation as a departure from Marxism-Leninism—and these statements have meant nothing. (At the 20th Party Congress, Mikoyan said violent revolution was not inevitable—citing Czechoslovakia as a case in point!) It is therefore not improbable that the specific examples of the doctrines to be scrapped were chosen with an eye on the Supreme Court test of the McCarran Act, and with a large quantity of tongue in cheek. Yet in the present historical context, it is not completely impossible that for once at least some of the authors of a Communist statement meant what they were saying.

On the Soviet Union and the Khrushchev speech, the resolution said: "The party also viewed uncritically developments in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. It mistakenly thought that any public criticism of the views or policies of the Marxist parties of these countries would weaken the bonds of international working class solidarity or bring comfort to the enemies of peace and socialism. The incorrectness of this view was highlighted by the revelations in Khrushchev's special report to the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU. Because it held this view, the Communist Party of our country was entirely unprepared for and deeply shocked by the admissions of crimes, violations of socialist justice, mistreatment of certain national minorities, and the basis for the rupture of relations with Yugoslavia—all at variance with the truly liberating character of socialism." And then the inevitable sop to Cerberus: "The courage shown in making these disclosures and the profound process of self-correction begun some years ago and sharply accelerated since the Twentieth Congress, are irrefutable evidence of the historic role and vitality of the socialist system."

THE draft resolution's proposals for the internal government of the party likewise marked a sharp departure from previous theory, and an even sharper one from previous practice. These proposals called for: "Guarantees of real inner-party democracy through provisions of channels for freedom of discussion, dissent, and criticism within the framework of carrying out the majority

will. The National Committee should issue a special publication on a regular monthly basis which should be devoted exclusively to articles or letters discussing, debating, or differing with party policies, whether current or long-range. The decisions of all party bodies shall continue to be made by majority rule. Minorities or individuals opposed to such decisions shall be required to abide by them. But the right of such individuals or minorities to express their views shall be guaranteed in all cases.* However, this does not mean that factions—groupings with their own platform, discipline, organization, and publications of the party—can be tolerated.”

If these proposals were really put into effect, and not merely adopted on paper, the Communist party would turn into something very different from what it has been for the last three decades. And indeed the conduct of the present discussion would seem to indicate that, for the moment at least, it already is. In one respect, however, the National Committee felt that change could go too far. It opposed either liquidating the party or converting it into a purely educational organization. As to the proposal that the party be replaced by a “political action association,” as in the last phase of the Browder leadership, the National Committee thought that the time was not yet, but it did not close the door. In December, the Committee offered an amendment to this section, providing for further discussion of the question after the convention and authorizing the new National Committee to consider it further and perhaps call a special convention on it. Foster and Davis voted against this amendment, Dennis abstained after an amendment of his own urging that the Communists continue as a party had been rejected, and the other ten members supported it.

Meanwhile the party press and subordinate party organizations continued to exercise their new right to criticize. Both the *Daily Worker* and the *Freiheit* returned time and again to the subject of Soviet anti-Semitism. They even went so far as to criti-

cize sharply a statement of Ekaterina Furtseva, protégée of Khrushchev and alternate member of the Soviet Politburo, on the subject. In November and December the *Freiheit* printed a series of extremely critical articles on the situation of the Jews in Russia by a Canadian Communist, J. B. Salzberg, who had recently returned from there. These included the report of an interview he had with Nikita Khrushchev which indicated that the latter had at least a little in common with such earlier Ukrainian leaders as Bogdan Chmelnitzky (after whom it will be remembered that Stalin named a decoration) and Simon Petlura. Among other things, Salzberg reported Khrushchev as saying that both he and Stalin had opposed projects for Jewish settlement in the Crimea because they doubted the loyalty of Jews in time of war. On December 16, the *Freiheit* editorially declared that although Khrushchev “was willing to grant that every people has its virtues and its shortcomings, he saw only Jewish faults.” It went on to say that his remarks played into the hands of those who charged him with anti-Semitism.

EVENTS in Poland and Hungary also had their repercussions in the American Communist movement. At the time of the Polish Communist party’s revolt against Russian dictation, the *Daily Worker* gave full support to Gomulka; in general, it has supported the Tito-Gomulka thesis of the equality of Communist parties, and on this point the Foster forces have had little to say. It also criticized the use of Russian troops in Hungary, both initially and when they returned to overthrow the Nagy government, saying that it “does not advance but retards the development of socialism.” On this issue, however, the Foster forces rallied. A National Committee resolution of November 1, before the second Soviet intervention, called the action of Gerő in calling in Soviet troops “a tragic error” which “dramatized the bankruptcy” of Hungarian Communist policies. Criticism of the Soviet Union, however, was only implied in the statement that the Hungarian and Polish events showed that the decisions of the 20th Congress were “yet to be fully applied in practice.” Foster recorded his vote against this resolution, Dennis and Davis abstained,

*An amendment proposed by the National Committee in December altered this phrasing to make it explicit that party members would still have the right to dissent even after a decision was voted.

and James E. Jackson, Jr. approved it only with reservations. When it was clear that the Russians were fully committed in Hungary, however, the National Committee adopted a compromise resolution which certainly satisfied nobody. This statement, made public on November 19, declared that Gerő's use of Russian troops "was a tragic error for which the Soviet Union must also take responsibility," but defended the overthrow of Nagy as necessary "to head off the White Terror and . . . the danger of . . . an anti-Soviet, Horthy-like regime . . . which would threaten not only the security of the USSR and other socialist countries but world peace as well." And then it indicated that it really didn't mean all this by adding: "There are no ready answers and we are in no position to give final judgment on the Soviet action. On this there are different viewpoints in the National Committee and in the party."

The existence of these divisions was clearly shown in the bitter polemics which followed in the columns of the *Daily Worker*, in which Party Secretary Dennis accused that paper of looking at the Soviet Union "through the eyes of American imperialists," while Max Gordon, of its editorial staff, charged Dennis with "blind apologetics." Even when the Russian magazine *Kommunist* brought up its heavy guns and accused the *Daily Worker* of "babbling" and equating the invasion of Egypt with the use of Russian troops in Hungary, the *Daily Worker's* editors refused to retreat. Instead, they fired back on November 26: "No, we do not 'equate' the events in Hungary with the imperialist invasion of Egypt. But neither do we condone Soviet policies in Hungary or those of the Hungarian Communist Party." And asking whether *Kommunist's* "dismissal of our views as babbling comes under the heading of fraternal spirit," the editors suggested that "*Kommunist's* editorial writer follow the advice of *Pravda* to Marshal Tito on the friendly tone required in such discussions." Nor did the *Daily Worker* criticize only Russian armed intervention; although generally favorable to Tito, it defended Milovan Djilas when Tito imprisoned him for criticizing dictatorship. On the other side, Foster gave the Soviet position all-out support; on January 9 he stated in the *Daily Worker* that "the bulk of the party" had reached "the same opinion as

that of Communists in other countries, particularly with regard to the 'grim necessity' for the Red Army to enter that country to prevent a very serious growth of reaction and war danger."

SO DEEP are the divisions within the Communist party today that the coming convention will almost certainly not resolve them. Even should the "revisionists" carry everything before them, they are already pledged to let their opponents keep up the fight. It is doubtful that, under the present circumstances, the latter would split off voluntarily; it would mean depriving themselves of access to the party press, and it would not be easy for them to find a substitute. If, on the other hand, Foster should be victorious, it could only be by an alliance with Dennis, who is obviously desperately anxious to find formulas that would preserve party unity; expulsion of the *Daily Worker* group would therefore be very unlikely. Nor would the latter be likely to secede *en masse*, although many of them would doubtless leave the party individually. (Indeed, whatever chance the Foster wing has of controlling the convention comes from the fact that there have been heavy defections from the party in recent months, and that these have, of course, been chiefly among those critical of the Soviet Union.) An additional factor tending to unite the party is the respect which all factions still appear to retain for the Chinese Communists; quotations from Mao seem to be getting more numerous than those from Lenin and Stalin, and there has been little criticism of the Chinese Communists, although the Connecticut party did call on them to release their American prisoners.

Nevertheless, the logic of the positions of the contending groups would seem to be driving them further apart rather than nearer together. The new wave of Soviet repression in the satellites and the increasing strain between the Russians and Tito seem certain to sharpen the conflicts within the American party and to accelerate the tendency of its "liberal" wing to turn away from Communism. But no course seems likely to stem the party's decline: whatever decision it may formally adopt as to its structure and function, it has already effectively ceased to be more than a "political action association."